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Testimony to the GAE Committee—Public Hearing, March 11, 2013

HB 6429 AAC Overvotes For Cross Endorsed Candidates--OPPOSE

Greetings, Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, and members of the GAE Committee. We are the two registrars of voters for the Town of Wilton—Tina Gardner (R) and Carole Young-Kleinfeld (D). We wish to submit joint testimony on the following proposed bills.

S.B. No. 779 AAC Overvoting Of Cross-Endorsed Candidates—Oppose

H.B. No. 6429 AAC Overvotes For Cross Endorsed Candidates –Oppose

Unnecessary, Time-consuming, Wasteful Burden for Voters— As registrars of voters from the Town of Wilton, we are committed to protecting the rights of all eligible citizens to participate in their democracy without casting unnecessary obstacles in their paths. Currently our voting machines are programmed to count only one vote on a ballot where a voter has cast a vote—on each party's line—for a candidate who is cross-endorsed by two political parties. The tabulator recognizes that these double votes are to be counted only once, and displays these votes as "Unknown Party" on the machine report tape. Registrars verify that this process is working correctly through their pre-election testing of the voting machines. In our experience, voters are NOT confused by this option.

On the contrary, voters who cast a vote for a cross-endorsed candidate on each party line are strongly convinced that they wish to elect that specific candidate—regardless of party affiliation. To reject these voters' ballots and require them to re-do their ballots is an unnecessary, wasteful, and time-consuming exercise at a polling place for a voter who has already made it very clear which candidate he/she wishes to elect. We believe that this extra step will make busy voters throw up their hands and leave without casting a ballot at all.

Loss of Votes for Candidates. Connecticut's voting machines are programmed to reject ballots containing true overvotes (voter errors) for races where there are no cross-endorsements. If a busy voter chooses to leave without re-doing a ballot, all races except the overvoted race will be counted, either by hand or by an override feature at the end of the election. It is simply not fair to the voter or to a cross-endorsed candidate to allow that vote to be rejected when officials can easily determine the candidate who should receive that vote but not the political party affiliation associated with that vote.

Disenfranchisement of Absentee Voters—Since those voters who cast absentee ballots are not present to redo a ballot, there is no way for election officials to discern to which political party the voter would have preferred the candidate's vote to be attributed. Because a voter has made it perfectly clear that they have a strong preference for one candidate over another, votes for cross-endorsed candidates should not be discarded as typical overvotes. We believe that these votes should be reported as votes for the candidates, but not attributed to either of the cross-endorsing parties.

Although, in 2011, the legislature mandated a formula that distributed these double votes for cross-endorsed candidates proportionally among the political parties, this practice is error-prone and unwieldy for election officials. Unless Connecticut opts to redesign its ballot to be similar to other states, we favor reporting these cross-endorsed votes to the Secretary of the State with no party attribution at all.